

First Things First

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 January 2019

Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0 : 00] Well, it's the last Sunday in January. We have, we're not quite at the end of the month, a few days left. We have 11 months to go, so we're still at the beginning of the year.

We're meeting this afternoon to discuss what our priorities should be in the coming year as a church, with our annual general meeting. And so that question has been rolling around in my mind. As a church, what should be our top priority in 2019? I wonder how you would fill in the blank to that statement.

As a church, our top priority in 2019 should be, what comes to mind? Is it church maintenance and renovations, projects, dealing with the sewage issue in the basement, replacing the carpet, dealing with our sound and PowerPoint issues?

Is it growing our ministries as a church, finding more volunteers to serve with kids, with youth, with church cleaning?

[1 : 14] Is it getting organized better as a church? What should be our top priority as a church in 2019?

Well, this morning, we're going to look at Paul's answer to that question for one of the churches in his letter. He wrote a letter to Timothy.

Timothy was a pastor. He was a shepherd. He was an elder, an overseer in the church at Ephesus. And Paul actually, in his letter, tells Timothy why he's writing to him.

In chapter 3, verse 14 and 15, he says this, Timothy, in case things don't go according to plan, in case I get held up, I'm giving you all these instructions in my letter so that you will know how you ought to conduct yourselves as members in the household of God, in the family of God, so that you'll know how to behave, how to act, how to live as the church of the living God.

Paul gives a whole bunch of instructions in this letter. Which one is most important? Out of all the things that he instructs Timothy to do and the church to do, which of them is most important?

[3 : 05] Paul actually gives us a bit of a hint and answers that question for us in verse 1 of chapter 2. He says this, This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

And for this purpose, I was appointed a herald and an apostle. I'm telling the truth. I'm not lying. And a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.

Therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

Are you surprised by what Paul says here? I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made.

First of all, before all the other things that I'm going to tell you, prayer. There are so many other things Paul could have chosen to put in that blank of what should be your top priority in Ephesus, Timothy.

[5 : 02] I urge you to preach the word. I urge you to correct those false teachers. I urge you to deal with the issues in your church.

But before all that stuff, first out of everything, I urge you to pray. I urge that prayers be made.

Paul actually, he uses four different words for prayer here. He says, I urge that petitions be made. Petitions or requests. In this context, requests to God. I urge that prayers be made. It's just the common word for prayer, that words be spoken to God.

I urge that intercession be made. A very specific kind of prayer, which refers to, generally in cases where there's somebody that's higher or above you, asking them for help on behalf of someone else.

[6 : 10] He urges that thanksgiving be made. Expressions of heartfelt gratitude to God. Four different kinds of prayer.

Why does Paul urge four different kinds of prayer? I think, generally, what he's saying is, I want you guys to pray all kinds of prayer.

All kinds of prayers. Not just one kind. Not just one frequency or type. But I urge you to be praying all kinds. The full spectrum of prayer.

For who? For all people, he says. All kinds of prayer. For all kinds of people.

For everyone. Nobody is to be excluded. There's been some tension in this church. Between Jew and Gentile. Paul's referred to that earlier on in chapter 1.

[7 : 16] He talks about how there's some who want to be teachers of the law, but they don't know what they're talking about. Or what they so confidently affirm. And there may have been some division and faction.

In the church. Or in the region. But nobody is to be excluded from prayer. Pray for everyone. Jew and Gentile. For all people.

Slave and free. Friend and enemy. Those who treat you well. And those who persecute you. All people.

Even kings. And those in positions of authority over you. Those are some of the people that probably have caused some big trouble.

For the church in Ephesus. For Paul. And for Timothy. As they've gone on their travels to spread the news of Christ.

[8 : 20] Pray for all people. Even the kings. Even those in authority. Even the emperor. And the regional governors. And the municipal government.

Pray for them too. They're not to be excluded. All people. All kinds of prayers. For all kinds of people. And Paul gives five reasons why we should pray all kinds of prayers.

For all kinds of people. And this should be our. What we focus on. First of all. And the first reason is specifically related to kings.

And those in authority. He says pray for kings. And all those in authority. That we may live peaceful. And quiet lives. In all godliness. And holiness.

God is able to turn the heart. Of those in authority over us. Such that we can live out our faith.

[9 : 25] Without hindrance. He is able to do that. He is lord. Even over. The people that have the most power. In our world.

Kings. This is a huge encouragement. To remember. And the reason we're to pray for them.

Or at least one of the reasons. That we're given here. Is that we may live peaceful. And quiet lives. In all godliness. And holiness. As a bit of a side point here.

Some have seen in these words. A bit of an excuse. To keep their faith to themselves. To keep silent.

To hide their lit candle under the bowl. See it says. Peaceful and quiet. We're to be quiet. Preach the gospel. If necessary.

[10 : 22] Use words. I hate that quote. It's not true. The gospel. Is news. It's a message that has words. You can't tell people.

About who Jesus is. And what he's done for them. Without words. Peace. That's not what Paul's talking about. It's an expression. In peace. And quiet.

He's referring generally. To their relationship. To the government. That there is no disturbance.

There is no. There's no disruption. Or interruption. That they're just able to freely.

Live out their faith. In Christ. The word for quiet there. Could be also used for tranquil. Or calm. He says.

In all godliness. And holiness. Godliness is another one of those words. That we easily miss. Or mistake. We maybe narrow it down too much.

[11 : 18] As in a godly life. Is a life. That is lived. Morally. By God's standard. And it is that. But the focus of this word is really. It could be translated as.

In all devotedness to God. God is. Pray for your leaders. For those who are in authority over you. Because God is able to turn their hearts.

Such that you are able to. Live out your faith. In all. Devotedness to God. Without interference.

Without causing a disturbance.

Spreading the news of who Christ is. Making disciples. Without disruption. Think about the time that Paul first came to Ephesus.

The city. For a moment there. Swelled into. An uproar. They were rioting. Everybody was shouting as one man. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

[12:17] And thankfully. It didn't end with Paul. And his companions being thrown in prison. But there were other cities. Where it did. That's the kind of. Thing that we don't want to see.

And so pray. For those in authority over you. So that. We may carry out. And live out our faith. Fully devoted to God.

Without hindrance. Spreading the message of Christ. Christ. As I was thinking about this. Even just last night. Talking to Jen. We.

Have that freedom. Here. In Davidson. We don't have anybody. In the government. Breathing down our necks. Saying.

You can't say that. Threatening to throw us in prison. Are we making the most. Of the opportunity.

[13:16] That we have. To live out our faith. Fully. And to spread the news of Christ. The second reason.

That Paul gives. For why we should pray. All kinds of prayers. For all kinds of people. Is in verse three. He says. This. Is good.

And pleases. God. Our savior. Do you have in your heart. A desire. To do something good. To do something.

That pleases God. Then pray. All kinds of prayers. For all kinds of people. This is good.

This is the thing. That God. Smiles upon. And desires. For us to do. That's the second reason. The third reason.

[14:16] Comes. In verse four. This is good. And pleases God. Our savior. Who wants. All people. To be saved. And to come.

To a knowledge. Of the truth. This specifically. Gets at. Why we should pray. Not just for some people. But for all people. Why all people.

Because God. Desires. All people. To be saved. He says. This is good. And pleases God. Our savior. He is our savior.

He has saved us. But. He doesn't just want to save us. He wants to save. All people. More people. And so we should pray for.

Everyone. For all people. And all kinds of people. Nobody is to be excluded. God desires to save all people.

[15:16] Jew. And. Gentile. The righteous. And the wicked. Even.

Kings. And those in authority. As corrupt. And immoral. And unbelieving. As they. May be. At times. The fourth reason.

For why we should pray. All kinds of prayers. For all people. Or all kinds of people. Is in verse five. And I imagine here.

That Paul says. You know. Let's just step back. And take a look. At the big picture here. What is going on. In our universe. He says.

For there is. One God. And one. Mediator. Between. God. And mankind. The man. Christ Jesus.

[16:17] Who gave himself. As a ransom. For all. What's really. Going on here. God. And mankind. They're in conflict.

With one another. They're at odds. With each other. You've got the good. And holy. And righteous. Judge. And you've got man. Lawbreaker.

And rebel. They're at odds. With each other. And there is one. Who stands. In between them. In the gap. He is.

The mediator. The only one. Who can bring. Man. And God. Back together. And restore. And reconcile. That relationship.

He is the only one. Who is able. To bring about. Forgiveness. For. And pardon. For the rebels. And yet.

[17:14] Do it. In a way. That is just. And how did he do that? Paul says. He gave himself. As a ransom. He paid the price.

Through. His death. For who? For all people. This is.

Another reason. Why we should pray. For everyone. Nobody is to be left out. Nobody is to be excluded. Because of. Status. Or position.

Or race. Or ethnicity. Whether they're moral. Or immoral. God desires. To save all people. Christ died. As a ransom. For all people.

He paid the price. That whoever. Will believe in him. Whoever. Might be saved. For God. So loved the world. That he gave his. One and only son.

[18:12] That whoever. Believes in him. Shall not perish. But have eternal life. The final reason.

Paul gives. For why we should pray. All kinds of prayer. For all kinds of people. All people. Comes in verse 7. Paul says this. He says. And for this.

Referring to that big picture. That he just talked about. I was appointed. A herald. And an apostle. I'm telling the truth. I'm not lying. And a true.

And faithful. Teacher. Of the Gentiles. God is in the business. Of saving people. He desires. All to be saved.

Christ died. As a ransom. For all people. And he. Intentionally. Appointed. Me. As an apostle.

[19:12] As a herald. As one who. Declares. Out loud. For others. To hear. So that. Everyone. All people. Would hear. What.

I have done. To save them. Who is he appointed. An apostle. To. A teacher of. He says.

Of the Gentiles. Not just for the Jews. But for the Gentiles. All. People. All kinds of people. All kinds of prayers.

For all kinds of people. And so. He gives us. Those. Five reasons. I'll just. Recap them quickly. We're to pray for kings.

Because. God is able. To turn their hearts. So that we can live. Peacefully and quietly. Fully devoted to him. We are to pray. All kinds of prayers. For all kinds of people. Because this is good.

[20:11] And pleases God. We are to pray. All kinds of prayers. For all kinds of people. Because. God wants. All people. He wills. All people. To be saved. And to come to a knowledge.

Of the truth. We're to pray. All kinds of prayers. For all kinds of people. Because Christ died. As a ransom. And came as a mediator. For all people.

And. We're to pray. All kinds of prayers. For all kinds of people. All people. Because God wants. Everybody. To hear. About. Who Jesus is.

And what he has done. To bring about salvation. So as a church. Here in Davidson. Our top priority. In 2019. I think. Should be the same. Prayer. All kinds of. Prayers. For everyone.

[21:06] For all kinds of people. People. This hit me in. Three ways. As I was thinking about. Kings. And rulers.

And those in authority. I'll be the first. To admit. That I spent. Much more time. Talking about. The problems. In our government. Than I have. Praying for people. In our government.

We should be praying. For. For. The town council. For. School boards. And principals. For the premier.

Scott Moe. For the prime minister. Justin Trudeau. For. MLAs. And MPs. For those who serve. In the judicial system. For cabinet ministers. We should be praying. For these people. The king's heart. Is like a stream of water.

[22:02] In the hands of the Lord. And. The Lord turns it. Wherever he pleases. Said Solomon. In Proverbs. God can do amazing things.

When we pray for. Those. In positions of authority. The second place. That this. Really impacted me. Is just that.

How wide this is. We should pray for everyone. For all people. Nobody to be excluded. As I think of my own prayer life. If I'm honest.

I spend most of my time. Praying for other people. Praying for. My family. And for our church. Sometimes the. You know. People outside of those circles.

Come in. And I pray for them. But not nearly as much as I should. God desires. Us to pray for everyone.

[23:01] He wants all people to be saved. Including the people of the Davidson community. He wants. He. Christ died as a ransom for. For all.

Which includes people of the Davidson community. He wants everyone to hear. About. His son. And what he has done. Which includes people of the Davidson community.

Am I praying. For those people. Or am I just praying for my family. And my friends. The people that I. Like. Am I praying for that neighbor.

Across the street. Who rarely comes out of his house. Am I praying for. That person who rubbed me the wrong way. The other day. All kinds of prayers.

For everyone. And if God. Desires for all people. To be saved. Then our prayers. Should go beyond Davidson community. To. To the world. There are places in our world.

[24 : 03] Where there is no access. To the good news. There is no Christian presence. There is no church. There are places where.

Terrible things are happening. Like South Africa. I was reminded of that on Sunday. We had a family over to our house. Who just came over from South Africa. Three months ago. And they said. Things are terrible there.

We feared for our lives. And that's why we left. If God desires. To save. And to show kindness.

To all people. Then we should pray. Not just for. Our neck of the woods. But for places. Around the world. And for people around the world.

We may not be able to cross. Geographical lines. Or cultural lines. Or linguistic lines. But our prayers can.

[25 : 00] And our prayers can go with. Those who are going across those lines. And so we should be praying regularly. With and for. Those people. And those places.

You might be wondering. Well. How do we pray. For these people. What should we be asking God for. That's going to be the focus. In this number of messages.

We're going to look at. What should I be praying for. For myself. For my family. For our church. For our community. And for our world. What kinds of prayers.

What kinds of things. Should I be asking God. For. So often. We just. Degenerate into. Mark. God. Please. Online. Or Shannon. Please. So and see. To. And be.

With. So and so. And bless. So and so. And bless. so-and-so and be with and bless and be with and bless and be with and bless and be with. But I think God wants us to ask specific things for people. And so we're going to look at that in the next coming weeks. But I want to end this morning with a practical note that I think Paul wants us to hear. And it comes in verse 8. After all of this, I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people, all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people. Therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. Why does Paul single out the men here? And we know that this is specifically the men, because the next verse is for the women. He uses a different word for men here, the kind that can only refer to men. Why does he single out the men here? Is it because he knows that the men in Ephesus didn't pray much? That was my first guess. But then I looked a little closer and it says,

[27 : 07] I want the men everywhere, not just in Ephesus, everywhere, literally in every place to pray. Men, is Davidson included in every place?

I don't think it's a coincidence. Paul gives this huge statement of how prayer should be the first of all things that we do as a church. And then he says, therefore, I want the men to pray.

Who's responsible in our church for seeing that prayer is a priority? I know what some of you are thinking. Well, that's your job, Josh. That's why we pay you the big bucks.

Actually, it's our job, men. It's our job in our families and it's our job in the church. It's our responsibility to lead the way in prayer and to see that we create time and space in the family schedule and in the church schedule for prayer, that it is the priority that it should be in our church. So, men, I'm talking to myself too. This week, we need to think. We need to pray. We need to ask God how we are going to do this in 2019. How are we going to see that prayer is a priority in our church in the year ahead? What are we going to do? How are we going to lead?

[28 : 57] Let's pray. Father in heaven, we admit sometimes we take our salvation for granted.

We so easily focus on ourselves and we forget that there's a whole world of people out there that you love and that you desire to be saved.

Forgive us for that, Lord. We pray and ask that you would enlarge our hearts. We ask that you would help us as a church to respond to your words that we've heard this morning.

that we would actually live this out as a church. That as we look back on 2019 at the AGM next year, we will be able to say we gave our time and attention to the thing that you wanted us to do first of all.

Bring this about in grace by the power of your Holy Spirit in us. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.